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ABSTRACT

The practice of psychological intervention often relied on the ability of the therapist to understand how clients maintain a sense of relatedness to their world. Despite the many discontinuities of self-identity that affect the lives of clients, the success of therapy depends on clients' abilities to connect with human and nonhuman objects in their environments. In Winnicott's theory of psychosocial development, certain special possessions, which he termed transitional objects, are crucial in understanding how experiences are organized in the lifelong task of relating to objects and persons. The premise of this paper is that transitional objects form the basis for developing a sense of continuous relatedness to the outside world from birth to death. This review of the literature is a search to establish if transitional phenomena mediate the losses of life in a way comparable to the solacing and comforting objects that assist with early development. That transitional object relatedness is detectable and likely endures, though perhaps in a changing form, throughout life is the dominant prism through which this research is viewed. (Contains 65 references.) (Author)

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TRANSITIONAL OBJECTS IN ADULT LIFE: A PROCESS OF CONTINUOUS RELATEDNESS TO THE OUTSIDE WORLD

A Doctoral Paper

Presented to

the Faculty of the Rosemead School of Psychology

Biola University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Psychology

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by

Mark A. Clemons

December, 2002

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The practice of psychological intervention often relies on the ability of the therapist to understand how clients maintain a sense of relatedness to their world. Despite the many discontinuities of self-identity that affect the lives of clients, the success of therapy depends on clients' abilities to connect with human and nonhuman objects in their environments. In Winnicott's theory of psychosocial development, certain special possessions, which he termed transitional objects, are crucial in understanding how experiences are organized in the lifelong task of relating to objects and persons.

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TO THE OUTSIDE WORLD

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TRANSITIONAL OBJECTS IN ADULT LIFE: A PROCESS OF CONTINUOUS RELATEDNESS TO THE OUTSIDE WORLD

Introduction

The practice of psychological intervention often relies on the ability of the therapist to understand how his or her clients maintain a sense of relatedness to the world. Despite the many discontinuities of self-identity that affect the lives of clients, the success of therapy often lies within the patient's ability to connect with human and nonhuman objects in the environment. Such connection can be demonstrated across the lifespan and indeed is a fundamental prerequisite at the start of life as a vehicle of self-development (Bowlby, 1969; Fairbairn, 1952; Guntrip, 1971; Kohut, 1971; Stern, 1985; Winnicott, 1968/1989).

During the course of an internship at a federal medical center for female offenders, this author became aware of the importance of special possessions in the lives of adults that resembled the importance of special possessions in the lives of infants (Winnicott, 1968/1989). In Winnicott's framework of psychosocial development, these special possessions, which he termed *transitional objects*, were crucial to understanding how experiences were organized in the lifelong task of relating to objects and persons.

Therefore, the premise of this literature review is that transitional objects form the basis for developing a sense of continuous relatedness to the outside world from

birth to death. This perspective has been derived from clinical observations and **from** psychoanalytic interpretations of symbolic manifestations of the earliest experiences of object relations. As a part of therapy, the function of these symbols often appears to factor into the existential conditions of the patient.

A lifespan approach to developmental psychology acknowledges the need for connective experiences across developmental periods, as well as the transformation of developmental characteristics and processes over the lifespan (Baltes, Featherman, & Lerner, 1990; Mack & Viederman, 2000). The developmental task of separation in early childhood is mirrored in the developmental task of separation in old age—the ability to feel securely attached while leaving the familiar behind. Successful relationships in later life require separation from middle adulthood and adapting to new horizons of old age. Therefore, the childhood search for relatedness via the transitional object can be viewed as a precursor to the development of establishing fields of relatedness for the adult.

This review of the literature was likewise a search to explore whether transitional phenomena mediate the losses of life in a way comparable to the solacing and comforting objects that assist early development. What happens to the magical action of the original cuddly object that enables safekeeping and separation from the parent in infancy? Does it reemerge in new forms? Is there an underlying transitional process that presents as memorabilia, memories, or activities representing continuing attachments to loved persons or connections to the past as well as links to the ensuing end of life?

Each theorist's perspective on transitional objects has been critiqued for its ability to systematically explain transitional phenomena across the lifespan. Likewise,

the research studies have been analyzed for their contributions and limitations in providing evidence of transitional phenomena within different populations and environments. Most of the studies cited in this paper were qualitative in nature or relied on case studies and other descriptive methods. As with many descriptive studies, there are several inherent weaknesses with such an approach.

Yin (1994) defines the case study as "...a qualitative empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used" (p. 23). Case studies can be single or multiple-case designs, where a multiple design must follow a replication rather than sampling logic. When no other cases are available for replication, the researcher is limited to single-case designs. Yin points out that generalization of results, from either single or multiple designs, is made to theory and not to populations. Multiple cases strengthen the results by replicating the pattern matching, thus increasing confidence in the robustness of the theory.

Case studies are often criticized due to their anecdotal nature. In this age of complex experimental designs and statistical analyses, the power of the case study is often overlooked. Case studies are a powerful tool for generating hypotheses that can be further explored using experimental methods. For example, the study by Stevenson (1954) was specifically cited by later researchers (Hong & Townes, 1976; Rudhe & Ekecrantz, 1974), who attempted to refine Stevenson's work by including control groups and focusing on more clearly defined constructs.

Case studies, however, are not simply a preliminary step. They possess strengths that are missing in much of the more controlled quantitative research. For example, case studies produce more detailed information about a specific situation than what is available through a statistical analysis. Likewise, the case study approach is a comparatively flexible method of scientific research. Because its project designs seem to emphasize exploration rather than prescription or prediction, case study researchers are comparatively free to discover and address issues as they arise in their investigations. In addition, the less prescribed format of case studies allows researchers to begin with broad questions and narrow their focus as their investigation progresses rather than hypothesize possible results before the experiment is conducted.

By seeking to understand as much as possible about a single subject or small group of subjects, case studies can specialize in "deep data," or "thick description" (Yin, 1994). Such information, based on specific contexts, can give research results a more human face. This emphasis can help bridge the gap between abstract research and concrete practice by allowing researchers to compare their firsthand observations with the quantitative results obtained through other methods of research.

Such strengths are why combining quantitative methods with experiential case study strategies is so important. Carefully controlled experimental studies on transitional phenomena are lacking in the literature. This weakness likely has its genesis in the belief of many psychoanalytic clinicians and researchers that research in general changes the dynamic of the therapeutic environment to such an extent as to make any conclusions of little value (Edelson, 1986).

However, by carefully examining all of the intricate components of a specific situation and how those components are related to each other, case studies can facilitate an understanding of the whole that surpasses the sum of the analyzed parts. They can question existing concepts, refocus the direction of research, and readjust hypotheses as new findings are discovered. Although the results of one case study may not always generalize to other cases, this holistic understanding can help identify why the results may not generalize. No two organisms are ever exactly the same, and no results are unequivocally universal. The case study accepts and even embraces this fact.

To investigate phenomena such as transitional objects, the case study approach may also utilize a plethora of tools, among which can be unobtrusive observation, participant-observation, empathic-introspection, focus groups, quantifiable questionnaires, and structured and unstructured interviews conducted via phone and/or face-to-face contact (Yin, 1994).

It is difficult to establish cause and effect relationships strictly utilizing qualitative studies. For instance, several studies in this review (Myers, 1988; Sherman, 1991; Sherman & Newman, 1977-1978) provided excellent descriptions of transitional phenomena and recorded such phenomena in multiple settings across the lifespan. However, the researchers had to rely on established theory or their own conjecture when suggesting reasons why transitional phenomena were utilized by the participants.

The qualitative research cited in this review often used varying definitions while claiming to measure the same construct. The best example of this concern is the research done by Horton, Louy, and Coppolillo (1974) and Volkan (1972). Both researchers went

to great lengths in defining what was considered a transitional object versus what was considered a pathological reaction to stress. Volkan's definition of linking objects, which he perceived to be pathological responses, basically matched the definition of Horton's soothing intermediate space, which he considered adaptive (Horton, 1981). Thus each study provided useful information relevant to the defined constructs, but comparison with other research may be of dubious value.

Each of the studies in this review was analyzed in terms of the tools that were utilized, with the goal of assessing them for their effectiveness in adding to an understanding of transitional objects and transitional phenomena. Within this review of literature, the expectation of the writer was to find sufficient demonstrated support and sound theory regarding transitional phenomena across the lifespan to better inform the therapy process, specifically in terms of how transitional objects can help the client cope with change or stress.

Theoretical Concepts of Transitional Objects

Early forms of relatedness to human and nonhuman objects in infancy and beyond have been observed in the past, conceptualized, and even presented in theory as developmental markers. That this relatedness is detectable and may have endured in a changing form throughout life is, in fact, the dominant lens through which this body of research is reviewed. This review covers the following four areas: (a) psychoanalytic theory dealing with drive (fetish) objects, relational objects, transitional (solacing)

objects, and self-objects (internalized objects); (b) studies of the use of transitional objects beyond infancy; (c) and studies highlighting adults' uses of transitional objects.

Psychoanalytic Theory

A number of concepts developed by psychoanalytic theorists need to be elucidated as part of the current review of literature on the use of transitional objects. Goldberg (1988) believed that psychoanalytic theory provided a rich source of understanding for the human condition that was potentially lost in the unique verbiage of many psychoanalytic theorists. Goldberg maintained that a translation of various concepts is needed to insure the continuity of ideas. For example, he proposed that the concept of a transitional object in object relations theory appears to be similar to that of a need-satisfying object in drive theory. He explained, "... both share the qualities of an infantile usage on the developmental road to appreciation of complete or true or whole objects" (p. 34). Therefore in this paper the fetish object, the transitional object, the solacing object, and the self-object will be explored as psychoanalytic views that are theoretically distinct and provide different interpretations of clinical data and the process of human development.

Freud's Fetish Object.

Freud (1961b) referred to an object of erotic use as a *fetish object*, the origins of which he suggested are rooted in disturbances during infancy. He wrote, "the choice of a fetish is an after-effect of some sexual impression, received as a rule in early childhood" (1961a, p. 153). Freud (1961b) defined the fetish as a "token of triumph over the threat of castration and a protection against it" (p. 154). Begun in the phallic phase with

castration fears and later manifested in adult behavior, Freud considered the fetish a substitute for the missing penis of the mother. The most common fetishes are shoes, long hair, earrings, undergarments, and feet (Bronstein, 1992). Persons who use a fetish to ease their erotic life recognize, but disavow its abnormal presence. Freud (1961a, 1961b) conceptualized this psychological process as a defense mechanism in which the perception is split off (disavowed) as a way to disclaim external reality.

Using a developmental framework, Greenacre (1969) was one of the first to examine the overlap between the functions of the transitional object and the fetish. She examined differences in developmental outcomes to distinguish transitional object attachment (normal) from fetishism (abnormal). Greenacre concluded that symbolic magic is involved in both instances; however, the differences in the illusory functions of each are decisive. She wrote that transitional objects appear to have a "positive value in monitoring growth and expansion," and offer a "cushion against distress of frustration before reality testing is at all secure." (p. 163). The fetish, however, "serves as a patch for a flaw in the genital area of the body image" (pp. 158-163). If the child gives up the object's illusory omnipotence as separation anxiety eases and object constancy develops, then the attachment object is a transitional object. Otherwise, it is a fetish and protects perceived flaws in the body image.

Greenacre's (1969) ideas were based on a handful of case studies within her clinical practice. She tracked the majority of her studies through the client's childhood into early adolescence. Although she held more strictly to Freud's drive theory, she viewed the transitional object as having more than simply a stress relieving function.

However, she also viewed transitional phenomena occurring later in life in terms of a fetish, not as an indication of optimal development.

Bronstein (1992) stressed that articles used by a child as transitional objects are intended to control anxiety and depression. He believed a transitional object can be defined as a fetish only if the object becomes a substitute for or is more valued than the mother. Nersessian (1998) placed fetishism on a continuum that included other objects of value (e.g., amulets, transitional objects). Nersessian did not stress the value of the fetish as related to the mother, but viewed it as a symptom of the ego's inability to manage anxiety without resorting to an outside object. On his continuum, transitional objects were viewed as a more healthy way of dealing with anxiety.

Azevedo (2001) made the point that a fetish object remains fairly static in relation to its function as a pathological defense. In contrast, the object used in transitional phenomena contributes to the development of trust. The work of later psychoanalytic theorists (e.g., Kohut, 1971; Milner, 1952, 1978) counters the previous psychoanalytic focus on the fetish as pathology and begins to incorporate Winnicott's theory of optimal development. Review of these cited studies on fetishes highlights the difficulty in evaluating research based on dynamic or analytic principles. Traditionally, much of the research on fetishes has fallen within the psychoanalytic framework, which often relies on individual case studies to gather information and evaluate theory. Although a limited sample size and the lack of controlled variables will limit a researcher's ability to generalize, when these studies are individually considered the

total weight of the results can provide trends that may inform further treatment or research.

The cited studies and theoretical positions regarding fetishes point to a breakdown in the relational aspects of the parent-child dyad. This breakdown has a lasting impact on all other relationships. How a transitional object can be differentiated from a fetish object remains unclear, especially when considering the use of objects for the purpose of soothing or relieving stress.

Winnicott's Transitional Object

The concepts of *transitional objects* and *transitional phenomena* refer to the use of specific possessions and special activities (e.g., play, thought, fantasy) as well as the pursuit of all forms of experience that evoke the comforting environment of union between baby and mother during earlier development (Winnicott, 1968/1989). At a point when baby begins to perceive separateness, transitional activity recreates a maternal restorative experience with resources taken from the surrounding environment. Winnicott (1966) wrote,

> I have located this important area of experience in the potential space between the individual and the environment, that which initially both joins and separates the baby and the mother when the mother's love, displayed as human reliability, does in fact give the baby a sense of trust, or of confidence in the environmental factor. (p. 372)

The term *transitional object* was intended to give significance to the first signs of an acceptance by the developing infant of a symbol of his union with his mother. This

precursor to the infant's growing sense of separateness is at one and the same time part of the infant and part of the mother. The infant's addiction to it is recognized and allowed by the mother. This accommodation by the mother derives from the infant's absolute dependence on her (the environment) and is carried out as a function of her natural attunement to her baby. Winnicott referred to such a mother as "good-enough" in an "average expectable environment" to facilitate adaptation toward eventual independence and acceptance of reality (Winnicott, 1958/1975, p. 245).

Winnicott (1958/1975) proposed that the transitional object is the first "not-me" possession. The formation of the transitional object and its qualities are directly observable and appear to be a primary creative activity in which an affectionate relationship with an object is initiated by the infant. Fairbairn (1952) stated that this infant activity is object-seeking or object-relating, rather than satisfaction-seeking. This possession is not an internal object (i.e., a mental concept), but a possession that is not entirely external to the infant. It is inextricably connected to the baby's subjective apperception of reality and facilitates a growing objective perception of the outside world. The baby's experience with the object is linked to an intermediate area between outside and inside, and the relationship is based on illusion. A positive value is placed on illusion as a primary creative resting place between the self and reality (Winnicott, 1953/1989).

Winnicott (1966) extended the concept of intermediate space into the third area of experience, which is a derivative of play. Given the opportunities, the baby begins to explore creatively and to use actual objects and information, initially provided by the

mother, with which to create life experiences. This process makes life valuable to the baby. Without this experiential link, there is loss of meaning—no place to put what the baby has created that could contribute to the common pool of humanity. This first link created by the interaction between baby and mother assures the baby of the existence of the outside world. It might be compared to a sonar transmitter, which sends out pings to find the location and shape of an object. If the pings don't hit something solid, there is no returning echo that signals the object's existence. The baby creates this first symbol and is, hopefully, rewarded with the mother's reciprocal act of creating. This assures the baby that there is a caring, external world to which he can relate.

Winnicott (1953/1989) made a distinction between object-relating and object-using. Object-relating is a phenomenon in which the baby continues to seek to exert omnipotent control over the object. Object relating is initially necessary to create a bond between self and other, parent and infant. Object-using implies the person's awareness and acceptance of the object's independent existence. The object is not a projection; it is a thing in and of itself. This recognition is a change, a maturational process and an unconscious "destroying in fantasy" of the projection and identification processes that occur in object-relating, so the object can become external, then loved, and therefore used (Winnicott, 1953/1989). "Its fate is to be gradually decathected, not forgotten, but relegated to limbo, 'diffused' over the whole cultural field" (Winnicott, 1958/1975, p. 233).

Winnicott's (1954) keen observations of infants and children allowed him to reach beyond Freud's drive theory and focus on how a child develops a sense of a *true*

self. Winnicott believed that we all start out with a vital spark, a creative impulse, a true self. The baby can express wrath and rageful states that are not filled with hate. The baby destroys the object (mother) and if she survives his onslaughts and does not retaliate, a sense of "otherness" exists. If the mother cannot tolerate the infant's rage, the infant begins to create a false self to protect her true self from rejection, pain, and abandonment. Her false self develops "roles" to protect her true self. Eventually, with continued attunement failures on the part of the mother, the false self dominates the child's personality and the true self fades.

In a single case study, Coppolillo (1967) described a patient whose mother "brushed aside" objects that her child sought, particularly fairy tales and picture books. She interfered with her child's choices and deflected affective and physical attention toward herself, resulting in the consolidation of strong emotional perceptions and responses that ruled the patient's life. These experiences interfered with the child's need to be alone in the more neutral zone of an intermediate area of experience. As a youth and adult, this patient was unable to read and was culturally impoverished. Coppolillo concluded that an overly intrusive environment resulted in over-compliance and repressed feelings that interfered with the development of an autonomous ego. In later papers, Coppolillo (1967, 1988) stated that transitional objects should not be viewed as fixations. Furthermore, the author concluded that the ability to experience in the transitional mode was essential for optimal ego development and important in one's striving to achieve resonance with his culture.

Although Winnicott did not entirely abandon Freud's concepts, his theory better accounted for the movement from one developmental organization of reality to another. Likewise, his notion of attunement and "good enough" mothering makes intuitive sense when attempting to understand the emergence and consolidation of the personality structure of the young child. Children will develop a greater sense of being real and of being vital if they experience relationships that recognize their individual uniqueness and support their specific developmental needs.

Horton's Solacing Paradigm

Horton et al. (1974) suggested that the ability to personalize and to make an external object internally meaningful is a developmental milestone. Speaking of the infant, the researchers stated that "he suspends that aspect of reality just enough to permit himself to ascribe to the object those traits and qualities that he needs to see in himself at the moment" (p. 621).

Horton (1981) believed the soothing illusionary function of transitional relatedness promotes lifelong developmental processes. The child's continuing capacity to use elements in the environment to recapture and re-experience the primary soothing maternal process beyond childhood is understood by Horton as a developmental force. He described this developmental force as a growth process and series of lifelong changes that are influenced by experience and arise out of the interaction of maturational and environmental elements Horton recommended a new paradigm—a solace paradigm—to further understand how people offset the existential pain of living with "its best known vehicle, the transitional object" (p. 3). Classical psychoanalysis has no well-developed

theory of positive affects, feelings, or emotions. Horton wrote, "The work on solace and soothability, which focuses on the most basic of all object-seeking, non-instinctual feeling states, is, to my knowledge, the first systematic effort to develop such a theory" (p. 6).

Horton agreed with Winnicott's idea that the use of an object is a developmental, lifelong task. He chose to focus on the soothing aspects of transitional phenomena in reaction to what he viewed as the sterile psychoanalytic theory of the day. Because his ideas of the soothing aspects of transitional objects echoes Winnicott's theory, the idea of a new paradigm falls short. However, Horton's focus on the internalization of transitional relatedness as a soothing element throughout the lifespan brings focus to the lasting effects of transitional objects in relationships.

Stern's Representations of Interactions that Have Been Generalized.

Other infant research has corroborated a compatible process. In his description of evoked memories of an "I" experience with another in infancy, Stern (1985, 1988) supported the view that the transitional object and the transitional lived and reactivated experiences preserve the link to significant past history. He referred to this as *representations of interactions that have been generalized* (RIGS) and proposed a model in which memories are representations organized around various attributes of "lived-moments." His model suggests that affective links are present, and may be equal to other elements of experience (e.g., cognitive, sensory, active) without giving privileged status to any one of them. Compared to Freud's developmental model, this model allows greater flexibility and a greater range of interconnectedness of representation structures

and, in that sense, represents what is clinically evident (Stern, 1988). Stern adds another piece to the understanding of the continued interaction of transitional phenomena later in life. He moved beyond Freud's suggestion that the ego was derived merely from surface bodily sensations to a concept of an interaction of mind and body, especially as this interaction involves the memory of inner feeling states of comfort.

An example that fits Stern's model was elucidated in clinical data collected by O'Mahoney, Shulman, and Silver (1984) in their case studies of three widowed women (ages 78 – 84). Each had an imaginary companion that was associated with the lost spouse. This phenomenon suggests that the attachment to solacing objects of a previous developmental stage (e.g., toddlers' imaginary friends) could be adaptively reenacted at a later stage of development. These soothing mechanisms appear to render some immunity to the stress of the stark reality of inevitable loss, functioning in an analogous process like transitional phenomena. Although this study used a small sample (n = 3), it was one of the first to look for evidence of the soothing effects of transitional relatedness near the end of the lifespan. This study offers one plausible explanation for a person's ability to manage stress.

Kohut's Self-Object

Kohut (1971, 1974, 1984) proposed a theory of "wholesome self–self-object processes that build up the healthy self" (1971, p. 70). He suggested these processes occur in two steps. First, a basic intuneness must develop between the self and its self-object (mother figure). Second, the self-object (mother) fails and provides faulty empathy that is nontraumatic. The child's experience of these failures provides what

Kohut termed *optimal frustrations* and builds resilient personality structures that last into adult life. Kohut referred to these changes as *transmuting internalizations* in that they induce the child's "bit by bit taking over of the mother's functions" (1984, p. 349).

Kohut's (1971) concept of optimal frustration resembles Winnicott's (1958/1975) concept of environmental intuneness referred to as good-enough mothering. Winnicott stated that in a healthy process of disillusion, the ordinary fallible mother is able to adapt less and less completely to the infant's growth as an individual and consequent ability to deal with the mother's failures. If all goes well, the infant actually gains from the experience of frustration since incomplete adaptation to need makes objects real (i.e., separate from the infant). If close adaptation is continued too long, the feeling of omnipotence is prolonged and lends a magical quality to the relationship. Nevertheless the mother's attunement needs to be almost exact in the beginning (Winnicott, 1971).

Transitional Objects Beyond Infancy

Having special possessions in adulthood is widespread, if not universal. Studies over the past 20 years have revealed that special possessions are associated with life satisfaction and have an affective, symbolic, and temporal importance (Myers, 1988; Redfoot & Back, 1988; Sherman, 1991). The association of special possessions with life satisfaction is particularly apparent if these possessions have been actively acquired and had taken on the attributes of transitional objects. Indeed, evidence of transitional phenomena or transitional relatedness has been demonstrated in various age groups beyond infancy, including school age children, children of divorce, adolescents,

graduate students, and adults (Free, 1988; Horton & Gewirtz, 1988; Horton, Gewirtz, & Kreutter, 1988; Kamptner, 1995).

Cohen and Clark (1984) proposed that transitional objects are a way to internalize functions after they are no longer missed or needed. This internalization may exclude a portion of possessions that function soothingly as transitional objects in intermediate space, have not been internalized, and do not represent disordered personalities. Internalized functions and transitional object functions derived from the same source (particularly the mother) may operate at different moments in time, but may not always be mutually exclusive.

Some psychoanalytic case studies have noted the persistence of transitional phenomena into adult life (Kahne, 1967). Kahne observed that a reversion to specific objects or behavior patterns associated with transitional phenomena occurs at times of stress, deprivation, and disengagement. However, such reversions have not been found to be an indication of the diagnosis or severity of pathology. Rather, the assessment of whether or not the adult had received "good-enough mothering" as a child appeared to be a better indicator of future pathology. Kahne also suggested that the mothering factor holds greater potential for guiding adult treatment than does traditional analysis of defenses.

Research on Transitional Objects

Empirical and case studies of the use of transitional objects were reviewed for this paper. Studies of children were included to establish the common use of transitional

objects early in life as a part of normal development. The studies of children provide a basis of comparison with the use of transitional phenomena later in life. A discussion of the phenomenology of transitional objects in adulthood will follow. That is, what form do transitional objects take in adult life, and what are the meanings assigned to them?

The majority of the studies utilized in this paper were based upon non-standardized questionnaires developed by each of the researchers for his or her study. These studies involved analyses such as placing the evidence in a matrix of categories, creating flowcharts or data displays, tabulating the frequency of different events, and using means, variances, and cross tabulations to examine the relationships between variables. Generally, the goal of the questionnaires was to establish the incidence of transitional object use in the population of interest. Such an approach can result in the inclusion of confounding variables that may limit the ability to generalize or replicate the results. Therefore, the studies have been critiqued in light of overall themes or trends that then serve as a framework to better understand transitional phenomena. Most of the studies included in this paper utilized mothering as an interaction variable where the needs of the subjects varied, and the possibility for the mother (or other caretaker) to satisfy them (be "good enough") varied accordingly.

The strength of these studies lies in the naturalistic settings from which the data were collected. Furthermore, most of the researchers approached the subject from the same or a similar theoretical perspective. This aided in the analysis of the findings. Any special concerns regarding a specific study have been addressed in the context of that study.

Children's Use of Transitional Objects

First, those studies examining normal and pathological uses of transitional objects will be presented. Second, studies investigating the use of transitional objects by children in other cultures will be described. Finally, studies of the use of transitional objects by children with special mental or physical needs will be reviewed.

Normality versus pathology. Winnicott (1971) defined a normal and positive developmental sequence rather than any pathology that might be associated with attachment objects (i.e., their use as fetish objects). Stevenson (1954) was the first to follow Winnicott's (1953/1989) theory with an empirical investigation. She interviewed 56 English mothers whose homes differed widely from what was considered "normal" in terms of educational and social backgrounds. Data were collected in the form of relevant descriptions of the behaviors of the respondents' children. Stevenson then coded the descriptions by searching for key words and phrases. She separated the descriptions that identified transitional objects from those that did not. Next, she compared the two groups for patterns. Stevenson found that transitional objects were highly complex, rich in diversity, evident in a wide range of normal behaviors, best understood by the child's own mother, and essentially exemplary of a positive growth experience. Although Stevenson made an attempt to randomly select her subjects, her interpretation of the collected descriptions was based on criteria she developed using Winnicott's theory. Because her focus was on demonstrating Winnicott's belief in the common use of transitional objects as a necessary developmental task in the lives of children, she may have ignored, or not coded, evidence to the contrary. Her findings would have had more

meaning if she had also coded the absence of transitional objects and the child's resulting development. Some of the participants' children never used transitional objects, and Stevenson (1954) surmised that these children had not had the kind of mothering experience that could be transferred to an object. In other words, they either had too much or too little mothering. Nevertheless, these children did not demonstrate evidence of mental illness. This often-cited study exemplifies important research that draws attention to the normal aspects of attachment to specific loved objects in the lives of some children.

Cross-cultural practices. A few studies (Gaddini, 1970; Hong & Townes, 1976; Rudhe & Ekecrantz, 1974) addressed cross-cultural practices and evidence of "good-enough mothering" (Winnicott, 1971) as a basis for healthy developmental transitions. These studies explored the veracity of Bowlby's (1969) proposition that infants' attachments to inanimate objects occur less frequently in simpler societies than in more complex societies.

Gaddini (1970) conducted a study among rural, urban, and foreign children in and near Rome. She studied 682 rural children, 502 middle class children from the city, and placed 61 foreign children in a control group. Gaddini found that differences in child rearing practices affected the use of transitional objects. These differences were associated with physical proximity to mother, sleeping arrangements, precursor activities (thumb, pacifier, rocking, lulling, etc.), and social class. Children in the rural sample were found to have greater physical closeness to their parents and less frequent use of transitional objects ($r = -.71$, $p = .0001$) than those in the urban group.

The interesting finding in this study regarding the use of transitional objects was not the significance of the social class difference between the Italian groups but the significance of cultural differences between the Italian and foreign children. The foreigners more often used transitional objects as a means of comfort ($r = .83, p = .0001$) than either of the two Italian groups. One confound of this study was that the foreign children and their families were living outside of their home culture and therefore experiencing different stress situations than they might have had in their own culture. Gaddini did not appear to take this into account. Such a finding highlights the complex nature of transitional objects and the importance of evaluating any developmental theory in light of cultural factors.

Rudhe and Ekecrantz (1974) reported a high frequency of transitional object use that was positively related to the onset of weaning and to a mother's understanding of her child's autonomous and constant choice of a specific object. These researchers investigated transitional phenomena as a possible defense against separation anxiety among a sample of Swedish 6-year-olds. The researchers interviewed 77 primarily middle-class mothers of children attending elementary school in Stockholm. The mothers responded to notes sent home by the teacher and filled out a questionnaire designed by the researchers. The researchers examined evidence of strong emotional dependency on a specific object or a specific habit that played a comforting, soothing role in place of the child's mother as the main criterion of transitional phenomena. The researchers used a structured response format in which the mothers checked items that

were descriptive of their child. The researchers then coded the responses to look for patterns they had defined prior to the data collection.

Rudhe and Ekecrantz (1974) analyzed the data using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients. They found that children who had opportunities for close physical contact with parents had increased need tension (especially at bedtime), which correlated with the development of transitional phenomena ($r = .75, p = .001$). They found no evidence to suggest fetishism in these children. This finding contradicts the hypothesis that the use of transitional objects and pathological disturbances, such as fetishism, are parts of the same phenomenon. Except for those children who may be suffering from constant frustration or anxiety, or who appear to use their transitional objects as a replacement of mother, the transitional object seems to serve as an age-appropriate means for the child's adaptation to the necessities of reality.

A cross-cultural study conducted by Hong and Townes (1976) among American and Korean children also investigated differences in the incidence of attachment behavior toward inanimate objects and the conditions under which these differences occur. Researchers sent a 44-item questionnaire to the mothers of 279 children between the ages of 7 months and 8 years. Korean childrearing practices include more breastfeeding and more physical closeness associated with bedtime and sleeping patterns than do American practices. These behaviors were correlated with a lower incidence of transitional object use among Korean infants ($r = .22, p = .001$) than among American infants ($r = .64, p = .001$).

In another exploration of cultural differences, Applegate (1989) reviewed three studies that assessed the prevalence of transitional phenomena and noted a significant increase in the use of transitional objects in cultures or families where autonomy was valued and reinforced. In cultures that valued greater dependency and interconnectedness, transitional phenomena still occurred, but were present in a less observable form than they were in cultures that valued greater autonomy. Ahluvalia and Schaefer (1995) reviewed the empirical findings of transitional object use in the United States and concluded that transitional object use was common and was related to a lack of caregiver comforting prior to bedtime.

Triebenbacher (1997) surveyed parental perceptions and attitudes towards their children's use of transitional objects and found general acceptance of transitional objects as a part of early childhood. Her survey asked that both parents (75 sets) complete the questionnaire together regarding their children. The children ranged in age from 1 to 14 years. The involvement of both parents was a strength of this study. The previously cited studies had either asked only for the mothers' input or for only one of the parents to respond. The participants in Triebenbacher's study were from a broad range of socioeconomic levels in an urban setting. Triebenbacher analyzed the data looking for trends according to socioeconomic level and ethnicity. She noted that children from the higher socioeconomic, Caucasian groups gave up their transitional objects at a later age than did children from the ethnic minority groups, and the parents of these children likewise reported having used transitional objects up to a later age.

In general, these studies indicate a relationship between the level of autonomy within a family and the use of transitional objects. In families that reward more autonomy, the use of transitional objects appeared to be more prevalent. In this sense, transitional object use can be viewed as the child's attempt to manage the uncertainties of greater independence while remaining connected to a significant other.

Children with special mental or physical needs. Several researchers have examined transitional phenomena among children with special needs. Sherman and Hertzig (1983) conducted a study of transitional object use among mentally retarded and pervasively developmentally delayed children. Their findings suggested that the failure to use a treasured object before or after 2 years of age represented a less-than-normal cognitive and developmental marker. The Sherman and Hertzig study utilized semi-structured interviews with the primary caregiver. Sherman and Hertzig interviewed the mothers of 21 mentally retarded and 33 pervasively developmentally disordered children, ages 2 to 32 years. Their use of age 2 as a cut-off was based on prior research. Sherman and Hertzig concluded that significant developmental delays are unlikely in over 90% of children who do form an attachment to a treasured object during the first 2 years of life. Their conclusions would have been more dependable had their interviews included mothers of similar children under the age of 2 years.

In their study of infantile colic and the incidence of transitional object use, Jonsson and Taje (1983) found that good-enough mothering by itself could not mitigate babies' distress. They utilized a semi-structured interview with 43 mothers of 18-36 month olds and 29 controls. The use of transitional objects among these infants was

reduced compared to the control group. Jonsson and Taje concluded that a baby would utilize a transitional object as a substitute for the mother only if the mother provides the soothing the baby needs when she is present. If she does not do so to a sufficient degree, then the baby will have no use for a transitional object. Martin & Clark, 1982 proposed that healthy development might be furthered in other ways without the use of a transitional object. Babies may utilize other forms of self-soothing or remain in a stimulating environment with attention from several caretakers with little time away from a regular caretaker or mother.

Both the Sherman and Hertzig (1983) and the Jonsson and Taje (1983) studies interviewed mothers who were from urban settings and varying socioeconomic levels. Jonsson and Taje's (1983) study addressed the problems of definition of transitional objects in the literature. They noted a shift from earlier work that focused more on a Freudian analytic perspective to a greater focus on the relational aspects found in object relations theory.

Transitional Relatedness in Adulthood

In studying the possessions of normal adults, researchers (e.g., Mack & Viederman, 2000; Myers, 1988; Sherman, 1991; Sherman & Newman, 1977-1978) have also described a range of activities and the meanings assigned to them. In seeking to further define transitional phenomenology, its presence, and its course at later developmental milestones, researchers found that younger, middle-aged, and older adults often possess objects of special significance. The proposition that these possessions were associated with qualities of transitional relatedness was substantiated

in all the above investigations involving adult possessions. These researchers addressed the transitional relatedness experience in terms of the following developmental criteria: (a) differentiating self from other, (b) locating soothing experiences in an intermediate space between inner and outer reality, and (c) perceiving things in the environment that evoked memories of a previous time in the life cycle (Mack & Viederman, 2000).

Transitional possessions. Myers (1988) conducted a study among well-functioning middle-aged adults from an urban setting (n = 122) designed to discover the existence and characteristics of transitional possessions in adulthood. Myers developed a structured questionnaire that she administered to 122 participants. She used the term *transitional possessions* to indicate special possessions that underwent transformations embodying the relation of self to others over time. She proposed that these objects could be distinguished empirically from other possessions and from an individual's first transitional objects by their existence in later stages of development and in ways that were analogous to the first "not-me" experience of infancy. Myers suggested the following structural constants in the definition of a transitional possession: the possession is tangible, involves a relationship to another person, contains a significant emotional investment, has metaphoric (not literal) meaning, and is transformed over time. After administering the questionnaires, Myers created a matrix of key phrases and words and used pattern matching to find relationships. She found a high incidence (88%) of special possessions among the subjects that corresponded to her definition of transitional possessions. These findings support the notion that middle-aged adults'

attachment to such possessions serves growth-promoting functions in different situations and is not indicative of pathology.

The primary concern with Myers' (1988) study was in the questionnaire she developed. A review of the questionnaire found the questions difficult to understand, making the reliability of the information questionable. Myers' questions were not specific enough to gather the information she was seeking. For instance, none of the questions explored the metaphoric meaning of transitional objects, or their transformation from earlier stages of development. Myers conclusions on metaphoric meaning and transformation over time appeared to be based on what she believed, not on what she found in the data. However, Myers' research clearly indicated the use of transitional phenomena later in life, and her study was an important addition to the limited research on transitional objects with adults in this age group.

Sherman and Newman (1977-1978) measured subjective well-being in their study of adults (mean age = 75 years) who were attending senior service centers or residing in a nursing home that allowed personal possessions. These researchers also proposed that transitional objects in childhood are analogous to the cherished possessions of elderly persons. They suggested that valued objects might assist the adult (as well as the baby) in negotiating movement to the next developmental stage.

Sherman and Newman (1977-1978) hypothesized that meanings associated with these objects represent ego integration, ontological security, and coming to terms with the past. These mature characteristics were measured with the Life Satisfaction Index (LSI; Neugarten, Havighurst, & Tobin, 1961), structural interviews, and clinical

observations. The LSI was significantly correlated ($r = .69, p = .0001$) with identification of symbolic jewelry as the most cherished possession. Most participants in the study (81%) did, in fact, have a cherished possession. Only those without such possessions or those who were very old, lived in nursing homes, and possessed only photographs had low scores on the LSI.

Sherman and Newman's (1977-1988) research attempted to allow for greater generalizability by prolonging the processes of data gathering. They collected data over 2 years, which provided them with more longitudinal data on subject well-being with which to formulate their interpretations. They also employed a variety of data sources as opposed to relying solely on one avenue of observation.

In a later study among 100 elderly adults in nursing care facilities (age range = 60 – 102 years), Sherman (1991) surveyed the participants by interview and questionnaire to discover differences between memorabilia and transitional possessions. He defined *reminiscentia* as memorabilia that stir recollection and evoke memories about past periods of life, entire eras, or specific life events. However, Sherman's findings revealed that most cherished objects were valued for reasons other than reminiscentia. Instead, they were valued for their adaptive problem-solving capacity in helping adults cope with current experiences, rather than inducing memories or providing other meaning. Sherman suggested that symbolic interactionism, rather than transitional object relations theory, is a better theoretical framework for understanding the meaning of this person-object-action triad. This researcher suggested that special objects provide a symbolic means for understanding and working through current

problems by facilitating the ability to deal with loss, prepare for the future, gain courage, and renew the knowledge of being able to make it. Reminiscentia, in contrast, may serve a reconstructive function of connecting memories to whole areas of a person's life.

To improve validity, Sherman's (1991) study relied on *methodological triangulation*, Yin's (1994) term, by collecting his data from three sources: clinical interviews, questionnaires completed by the participants, and questionnaires completed by family members or nursing staff familiar with the participants. He addressed the reliability of his study by clearly defining and operationalizing the theoretical framework from which he was working, thereby establishing a protocol that could be used by other researchers. Sherman also cited similar research that gave further evidence to support his findings.

LaMothe (1998, 2000) viewed transitional phenomena in adults as a vehicle for connecting and extending an individual's experience of being alive and real to significant others or shared objects. In his psychoanalytically informed therapy, LaMothe views the goals of therapy, not in terms of analyzing the truth or illusion of the transitional phenomena, but in facilitating the client's experiences of being real in relation to and with independent objects. Thus the potential space of therapy serves to confirm the client's experience of being real and alive with others through the use of the containing and empathic environment of the therapy room.

Pathological phenomena. Two adult psychiatric studies (Horton et al., 1974; Volkan, 1972) compared clinical and non-clinical examples of the use and nonuse of transitional phenomena. Volkan interviewed 18 patients on a psychiatric ward that were

diagnosed as pathological mourners. Each patient had been admitted due to suicidal threats and inability to function within society. The average length of stay was seven months. He found that 14 of the 18 patients kept a possession that related in some way to their grief. He suggested that severe anxiety and increased tension surrounding the use of a special "jealously protected" object suggested a form of pathological object use in cases of unresolved grief and pathological mourning. Such objects were termed *linking objects* and were distinguished from transitional objects by their failure to provide resolution. In reworking grief with both inpatients and outpatients, ambivalence toward the lost person reflected a paradoxical need for and avoidance of the linking object. Patients who had a merger experience with the dead person via the external symbolic (linking) object rather than a transitional experience demonstrated the pathological and technical differences between linking and transitional objects.

A study by Horton et al. (1974) compared a sample of 19 sailors and marines with personality disorders to a control group of 22 normal sailors to determine whether or not personality disorders were correlated with the participants' ability to experience transitional phenomena. Horton et al. observed a significant negative correlation between the presence of personality disorders and the ability to experience transitional modes. The criterion for identifying and assessing transitional phenomena was the creation of a soothing illusion in intermediate space, such as the way participants related to military work or other affiliations. The researchers completed a social history on each of the participants, and had them complete a job satisfaction survey created by the researchers. Participants with personality disorders had no history of transitional object

use and demonstrated no current use. Conversely, 93% of the comparison group (sailors without personality disorders) demonstrated the capacity for using transitional objects. Horton et al. suggested that the most useful information for diagnosing severe personality disorders might be the presence or absence of transitional objects and transitional relatedness phenomena both in the past as well as in the present.

Elmhirst (1980) cautioned against an overextended enthusiasm for Winnicott's concepts and stated that his ideas had contributed to an unfortunate retreat from the study of internal object relations. Based on her own experience with adult patients, Elmhirst raised questions regarding possible pathology involved with transitional object use. Is the patient having illusions or delusions? Is the behavior creative play or a split-off area of disturbance? Elmhirst recognized the transitional object as important to the process of internal symbol formation, and she acknowledged the trauma involved when a patient's family regarded the object as an abnormal fetish and threw it away. However, she made a plea for further study of the differences between an appropriate use of the transitional object and a pathological, split-off area of disturbance.

Both the Volkan (1972) and Horton et al. (1974) studies attempted to demonstrate the use of transitional objects in psychiatric populations. Taken together, the studies suggest that the healthy use of transitional objects is correlated with a person's ability to form non-pathological relationships. Unfortunately, both studies utilized small samples within two distinct psychiatric populations. The Volkan study could have been better designed by including a control group of non-pathological

mourners at the hospital with which to compare the prevalence and quality of personal possessions.

Memorabilia and memories. Two additional criteria guided the search for literature related to adults' use of transitional objects: (a) the activity of reminiscence in older adults, and (b) the possession of cherished objects and memorabilia across the lifespan. Information on the first criterion was gleaned from a handful of reminiscence research studies done after Butler (1963) proposed the concept of the systematic Life Review as a developmental task toward the end of life. Butler posited that Life Review deliberations are an aspect of ego development and that they provide a perception of continuity between past, present, and future time frames. The process of engaging in Life Review is, therefore, integrative and beneficial, reinforcing a sense of resolution and self-importance as an auxiliary to long life.

Redfoot and Back (1988) questioned the validity of this approach, however, suggesting that this was "begging the empirical question by structuring the unit being studied into the research instrument" (p. 157). They stated the methods by which one explores experiences of the life cycle should not assume the very unit being studied. In other words, the life review data collected from study participants should not be used to prove the life review as a normative process. On the other hand, they proposed that environmental clues (e.g., possessions, memorabilia) can serve as indirect measures of the presence of chronological time frames of reference and would thus be a more valid approach to the study of ego development throughout the life cycle. Redfoot and Back surveyed 40 women (aged 62 – 98 years) who had recently moved into nursing homes.

The women came from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds and were assessed indirectly as part of an orientation group for the nursing home. The researchers noted the possessions brought to the nursing home and possessions the women missed or cared about the most. They observed a social class difference these women who were breaking up housekeeping that suggested a wide variation in the meaning attributed to different possessions and their relevance to reflection about the lifecycle.

The second criterion was related to possessive behavior. Furby's (1978, 1991) cross-cultural studies of the motivation behind possessive behavior across the lifespan found that interpersonal relationships had more effect on possessive behavior as the life-cycle progressed. She noted that control of possessions became increasingly important to participants over time as an expression of their ability to control the environment. Parents in all cultures demonstrated control over their property as an example to their children. Parents likewise demonstrated control over their children by limiting their children's opportunities to have or misuse possessions within the family. Later, as adolescents, and continuing into adulthood, children's social interactions with peers became more significant, and certain possessions also became highly valued. Furby found empirical evidence that the ownership of objects is related to one's self-concept and to one's sense of personal competence or control, a phenomenon she termed *effectance motivation*.

Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton's (1981) three-generational study of everyday things in today's materialist culture revealed that possessions play an important role in the enjoyment of everyday life. These researchers focused on common

household objects and their roles in organizing family life. They interviewed three generations within each of 36 families to determine the types and prevalence of use of personal possessions. The researchers also collected data on the family members attitudes about the importance of family and tradition. They developed their own questionnaires for the interviews and trained each interviewer to use a standardized approach. The sample was taken primarily from rural areas (n = 29), with a smaller sample from an urban area (n = 7). The researchers compared these two groups and did not find a significant difference in the areas measured by the interviews. Their data showed that families with high levels of expressed warmth among members had carefully preserved mementos of their own parents and retained objects from their own childhood, suggesting that artifacts play a role in integrating relationships.

Kamptner's (1991) lifespan study of personal possessions and their meanings in a sample of 577 persons (286 males, 291 females; age range = 10 – 89 years) found both age and gender differences. Kamptner developed several surveys and used clinical interviews to gather the data. Each of Kamptner's questionnaires focused on either "most treasured" or "most comforting" possessions for both past and current possessions. She then created a matrix of categories and tabulated the frequency of common responses. In response to questions about participants' most comforting possessions, males and younger persons emphasized active, physical, and instrumental items that had immediate qualities, whereas females and older persons emphasized symbolic items that had interpersonal significance.

Respondents' references to possessions followed Erikson's (1959) stages of

psychosocial development. Possessions of infancy promoted comfort and security and were related to the development of trust and autonomy. Possessions of childhood promoted activity and were related to the development of industry and competence. Possessions of adolescence promoted egocentricity and were related to the development of self-identity. Possessions of adulthood had social meanings and developed interpersonal networks. Finally, possessions of late age were reminders of the past, were markers of personal history, and were related to the development of ego integrity and a lifelong sense of self. Kamptner (1991) observed a shift in the value, meaning, and function of objects as their referents changed from mother in early life, to self in childhood and adolescence, and to others in adulthood. A concern with Kamptner's study was her reporting of such high reliability among the surveys she developed. In her discussion Kamptner did not consider that the high reliability might be suggestive of a systematic bias in the data. Because Kamptner created the surveys, conducted the interviews, and tabulated the results, the data may overly reflect her theoretical bias.

Summary and Conclusions

This literature review utilized a lifespan approach to demonstrate the use of transitional objects as a basis for developing a sense of continuous relatedness to the outside world. Beginning with psychoanalytic theory, this paper traced the development and use of transitional objects through childhood and into adult life. Multiple studies were cited that demonstrated the use of transitional objects throughout the lifespan and the mediating effects of transitional phenomena through experiences of change and loss.

Traditional psychoanalytical accounts of development have been linear and deterministic. Freud's (1961b) theory regarding the fetish object was contrasted with later developmental theories that examined the overlap between the functions of the transitional object and the fetish object. In Greenacre's (1969) work, the role of the transitional object is clearly differentiated from a fetish and shown to be a part of optimal childhood development.

Winnicott's (1953/1989) theory regarding transitional phenomena has elucidated an area of human development that is foundational for health and happiness. The theory of transitional phenomena is an attempt to explain the mental process carried forward as a highly valued development of personality (Tolpin, 1992). Winnicott proposed a maturational process in which the importance of the original transitional object (e.g., teddy bear) fades, thereby enabling a later capacity for illusion as a developmental basis for play, creativity, and the appreciation of culture.

The first studies focused on typical blanket or soft-toy transitional objects and precursor phenomena, but not on what followed from the infant's use of transitional objects. The childhood period of play was shown to be a critical period for activating the highly developed functions of transitional phenomena. As the original transitional object fades, transitional phenomena are then reflected in one's use of valued possessions for solacing comfort.

Likewise, Horton's (1981) solacing paradigm was examined to provide a basis for the use of transitional objects later in life. Horton reacted to the sterile feel of transitional psychoanalytic theory and developed his theory by emphasizing the soothing

aspects of transitional phenomena. Complementing Horton's theory, Stern's (1985, 1988) theory of representations of interaction that have been generalized was described to further highlight the importance and use of transitional objects in adulthood. Finally, Kohut's transmuting internalization theory was outlined. Kohut's (1971, 1974, 1984) theory complemented Winnicott's (1953/1989) good-enough mothering concepts and extended the theory of transitional object use to include adulthood. Tolpin (1978) stated that Kohut's mirroring and idealizing self-objects are internalized as autonomous self-functions of a person's psychic structure. Goldberg (1988) considered these self-objects to be expected and healthy throughout the lifespan.

This literature review examined many empirical and case studies that can have numerous weaknesses. For example, many of the studies utilized nonstandardized questionnaires to gather data for the investigation, making the results difficult to generalize to a population. Likewise, the case studies provided inherently anecdotal evidence that is also subject to investigator subjectivity. Therefore, it was not possible to establish cause-and-effect relationships utilizing the data in these studies. Several studies in this review (Myers, 1988; Sherman, 1991; Sherman & Newman, 1977-1978) provided excellent descriptions of transitional phenomena and recorded such phenomena in multiple settings across the lifespan. However, these researchers relied on established theory or their own conjecture when suggesting reasons why transitional phenomena might have been utilized by the participants.

The qualitative research cited in this review often used varying definitions though purporting to measure the same construct. The best example of this concern is

the research done by Horton et al. (1974) and Volkan (1972). Both studies went to great lengths in defining a transitional object versus what was considered a pathological reaction to stress. Volkan's definition of linking objects, which he believed to be pathological responses, basically matched the definition of Horton's soothing intermediate space, which he considered adaptive. Thus each study provided useful information relevant to the defined constructs, but comparisons between studies was not informative.

The strength of the studies in this literature review lies in the naturalistic settings from which the data were collected. Furthermore, most of the researchers approached the subject from the same or a similar theoretical perspective, which aided in analyses of the findings. Likewise, by explicating the intricate components of a specific situation and how those components are related to each other, the cited studies can facilitate an understanding of the whole that surpasses the sum of the analyzed parts. Subsequently, this body of literature facilitates the processes of questioning existing concepts, refocusing the direction of research, and readjusting hypotheses as new findings are discovered.

Further research should include outcome studies of treatment strategies that include interventions based on the use of transitional objects and other transitional phenomena in the client's life. Systematic application to both normal and clinical populations may validate the usefulness of the theories cited in this literature review. A longitudinal exploration of the development of transitional phenomena across the lifespan should also be undertaken in order to clarify and extend the findings of the

reviewed studies. Empirical research along these lines would aid the understanding of other characteristics of lifespan developmental theory.

The central meaning of the theory of transitional objects and transitional phenomena can be useful to clinical practice. Successful therapy often lies in clients' ability to connect with the therapist and to use that connection as a template for other relationships. As an integral part of this relatedness, the client may relate many transitional forms in an arc of continuity between significant self-differentiating childhood experience and self-chosen forms of adaptive comforting and self-expression in later life stages. A dynamic attachment to special objects or possessions that conserve and renew meaning to one's life is what Winnicott referred to as things that could "in fact make life feel worth living" (Winnicott, 1971, p. 65). These special dimensions communicate—in a uniquely meaningful way—an essential sense of being in one's inner life as well as to one's continuous relatedness to the outside world.

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